1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
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CHAPTER II.

KURDISH WOMEN: THEIR FAMILY CEREMONIES.

KURDISH maidens are, as a rule, allowed to choose 586
their own husbands, and the practice of courtship is
not unknown. The father's consent is necessary,
though couples sometimes dispense with it by running 587
away together when, for pecuniary or other reasons,
it is withheld. Among the families of the chieftains,
however, *mariages de convenance* are usual, and the
parties are frequently comparative strangers to each
other. The ceremony of betrothal consists of a 589
reception at which refreshments are served. The
expression "To drink sherbet"* signifies with the [272]
Kürds to celebrate a betrothal. The bridegroom's
presence at this ceremony is not necessary, or even
usual, and he is generally represented by a near
relative, a brother if he has one, who brings with
him the customary presents to the bride and her
parents.

The great feature at a Kürdish wedding is the 587 ●
performance of the *tekper*, or national dance, of which 585
the women are quite as fond as are the peasants of
Macedonia and Bulgaria. During marriage festivities,

* This favourite Oriental beverage is made of the juice of fruits, cooked with ice or snow.

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1: Garnett B-4, 5 (ca. 1880) 1891
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535 many come uninvited, bringing small presents to the
585 bride in order to be able to take part in the *dakpeh*.
This national dance of the Kûrds is very similar to the Greek *hora*. The performers join hands in a semicircle, and balance their bodies backwards and forwards, marking time, first with one foot and then with the other, accompanying their movements with wild shrieks at intervals. The step is, however, less animated and varied than that of the *hora*, and has been described as "a soft undulating movement of the whole circle in harmony with the music, like a field of corn set in motion by the wind." During its performance, the Kûrdish warrior will affect the most sentimental and romantic expression of countenance, especially when dancing with his sweetheart, which is customary at small gatherings where no strangers are present. On other occasions the men and women dance separately, though the latter even then lay aside their veils, no matter how great the crowd of spectators.

585 The music to which they dance is chiefly that of
535 the *dûdûk*, a kind of reed-flute, several of which are
538 played in unison. Its tones are soft and pleasing, though somewhat monotonous, Kûrdish music being in general, unlike Turkish and Persian, characterised by regular modulations. The airs are, for the most part, grave and melancholy, and would seem to be inspired by sentiments which one would hardly expect to find in the breasts of wild chieftains whose name has become familiar to us only in connection with
535 violence and pillage.

585 At weddings, the *dakpeh* is kept up for hours by

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relays of performers, the men dancing first, and then the women. Mr. Rich thus graphically describes the part taken by ladies in this national recreation: 535 585

"The music struck up again the notes of the *tekpeer*, and a string of about thirty ladies advanced, hand-in-hand, with slow and graceful steps, resplen- [282] dent with gold spangles and parti-coloured silks, and without even the pretext of a veil. This was really a beautiful sight, and quite novel to me, who had never in the East seen women, especially ladies, as all of these were, so freely mixing with the men without the slightest affectation of concealment. Even the Arab tribeswomen are more scrupulous.

"The line or string of ladies moved slowly and waringly round the enclosure, sometimes advancing a step towards the centre, sometimes retiring, balancing their bodies and heads in a very graceful manner. The tune was soft and slow, and none of their movements were in the least abrupt or exaggerated. . . . . This exhibition lasted about half an hour. The music then ceased, and the ladies retired to their [291] homes, first veiling themselves from head to foot, which seemed a rather superfluous precaution, as the crowd which was looking on at the dance far exceeded that which they were at any time likely to meet in the streets of Sulimania."

The Kûrds, being nominally Moslems, the marriage 585 contract is a verbal one, made in the presence of an imâm. The bridegroom, accompanied by a number of [713] his relatives and friends, comes to the house of the bride's father, and, after the festivities are concluded, takes her home with him on horseback. Sometimes a

still nightfall, and the time intervening is occupied by 585
eating and dancing. The wedding-dance is the ghe'li, a [535]
round dance performed by a circle of men and women, some-
times including the bride or bridegroom, holding each
other by the shoulders, with musicians playing the small [534]
drum, tambourine, and the wooden flute in the center. The
wedding-guests have sent offerings of food, and the father [431]
of the youth in return favors them with gifts of handker-
chiefs, turbans, and other articles of clothing. Most of
the women, in the presence of so many male relatives, are
unveiled, although a few remain indoors. The bride is [292]
carefully dressed in bright materials, and wears a white
cheesecloth which can be drawn across the face as a veil.
Kurdish chieftains attend weddings in their districts,
whether of Muslims or Nestorian Christians, and enjoy
themselves sitting on horseback, watching the festivities
and firing their weapons. They lend color and prestige
to the celebration, and are welcome visitors. Government
officials, in contrast, are rarely encountered at such an
event. When the bride and bridegroom are ready to retire, [431]
the latter is equipped with a present, a coin or a piece [272]
of jewelry. At the door of their room, an old woman of
the house, often a servant, waits with a glass of water
or sherbet. The bride drinks half of this, and her
husband the remainder, giving the old woman the present
in exchange. Alone together, the bride is expected, in
an almost ritualized fashion, to repulse her husband's

Both festivals are marked by dancing and music, and, as these are subjects in themselves, only the briefest descriptions are presented here. The usual type of dance is that of the she'i, the wedding celebration, and is performed by a circle of men and women with interlocked arms following a leader, the rear usually brought up by the host of the party or his deputy. The dance has three variations, sarrey'i, "going in the direction of the leader's right hand," shexey'i, "going in the direction of the leader's left hand, and rex'is "walking instead of dancing, and changing step." The dance step itself, for want of a better description, is a shuffle which takes one in a lateral direction. Kurdish music is similar to that of the Arabs, the Iranians, and the Turks, a single melodic line in a minor key, characterized by the appoggiature and turn, against a rhythmic background. Musical instruments, in Rowandus played only by amateurs, include the small drum, the tambourine, and the single or double reed flute. The lute is also widely used by the Kurds, but it is not found at present in the town. A program of typical Kurdish music may be heard broadcast daily by an Iraq government radio station. The investigator usually tuned in this music for the benefit of the women of the house in which he was living at Rowandus. Once the eldest daughter presented a request that "the boy tell the man" to play a certain song she wanted to hear at the moment, which indicated a sixteen-year old girl's knowledge of radio.

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who suffer from guilty conscience. As a concession to the faith, the government elite forewear their drinking and gambling parties. Many persons suffer greatly in keeping the fast, and one may exchange greetings with a number whose throats were so parched by afternoon they could barely speak. The younger children and the ill, it might be noted, are not required to fast. The twenty-seventh evening of the month (Arabic, laylat al-qadir, "the Night of Power," in which the Prophet was first addressed by the Angel Gabriel) is marked by special prayers and devotional exercises.

The month of fasting is ended by the appearance of the new moon, and this night begins Jeyjnî Remezan (Arabic, 'Id al-saghir, "the Lesser Feast"), the festival which occupies the first three days of the tenth month (Shewwal). This is an occasion of the greatest festivity. Almost every family has purchased a sheep or a goat in advance, and these are slaughtered. Their flesh is used in banquets or given to the extremely poor. Everyone in the household puts on their finest attire, and the children receive new clothing and gifts. Presents of money and food are given by the wealthy to their servants and the poor. Family gatherings, accompanied by the largest and best meal the household can afford, take place, and there is public dancing.

The last festival of the Muslim year observed in Rowanduz is Jeyjnî Qurban (Arabic, 'Id al-akbir, "the Greater Feast") which begins on the tenth day of the

585 [591] With one or two other young men and relatives he awaited the arrival of the bride at his family home which in future was also to be her's. Although these weddings were celebrated by peasants, a representative of the sheikh's house, either himself or his son, took part in the fetching of the bride. On the return to the village, the cortège now comprised a car containing the bride accompanied by two women: a female relative who must not be the mother[1], and the woman who later should return to the bride's family with the bridal sheet and its evidence of the bride's virginity. At another wedding, which took place at Rakawa to which cars could not reach, the bride was carried the last stretch by a white mare accompanied by women on foot. That the horse was a mare was to promote childbearing. On arrival at the house the bride and her companions are led in, their arrival being awaited by the female guests, while the men assemble on the clay roof of the house or on that of a neighbour, where carpets are spread out, cans were and buttermilk, and the festive meal is partaken. The law requires that all invited to this meal must attend unless there is valid reason for not doing so. On the other hand the host—in this case the father of the bridegroom—must ensure that the meal takes place in accordance with Islamic law[2]. The meal is prepared by the women but served by men for other men. Men also attend to the entertainment of the women[3]. No woman lets herself be seen by the men. The festivities for the two groups take place in strict segregation. When the meal is over, the men's dance begins on a small, uneven ground between the houses. The wedding festivities rarely lasted for more than one day.

585 535 The men's dance is a chain dance, in which, standing side by side, they take each other's hands and, at the same time place their forearms round that of the other man so that they stand shoulder to shoulder. The outside man of the chain waves a cloth in his raised free hand. The chain forms a semi-circle, and the steps take place radially, in towards the centre and out again, whilst the men in the semi-circle slowly move sideways. This dance resembles the Yugoslav Kolo, danced in the Balkans, a resemblance also pointed out by Wilson[4]. The same chain dance is reported from the Lurs in Iran[5] and from the Bakhtiari[6], where its similarity to the Greek Arrenestika is pointed out. However, both in Yugoslavia and in Iran the men appear during the dance to hold each other by the belt, whereas the Kurds hold each other firmly by the hand.

[911] [911] [911] The accompanying music is produced by a drummer and a clarinettist, whilst a third person in the group of common musicians collected money thrown to him by the spectators which he kept in a cloth sack, up under his waistband. The drum[7] hung on a cord round the drummer's neck and was played with two drumsticks, one of which was a thin, straight baton, the other a thicker, flat stick bent at the end. They were used on each side of the drum, and after use were stuck together. The clarinet[8] had a funnel-shaped bend, and when not in use was split into two pieces which were fitted into each other and placed in the waistband. These musicians arrived some days before the wedding was to take place and played in the men of the village in the small village tea house, in the afternoon and evening when the men danced the chain dance for hours in the light of two kerosene pressure lamps. The monotonous rhythm of the dance was stimulating, and ended in Tajuana one evening with accompanying revolver shots fired by the sheikh's son with an American or European revolver of which the house possessed three or four. There was less interest herein home than in European music, gramophone tunes being used instead of our tunes. There was no polyphony or

4: Ikonen E-5 (1957) 1961 MA11 Kurd MA11

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Fig. 52. Wedding dance. Men dance in a row to the music of a drum and a clarinet. Rakawa.

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harmonization, or, as Ekrem[19] points out, this music is to accustom feet and ears. Other instruments include a 20–30 cm. long shepherd's pipe, both single and double (E. 2280–81), referred to by Ekrem[19], one of which I acquired though I did not hear it played.

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To sum up: At a village wedding among peasants the men's rifle companies fetching the bride at daybreak, about 6 a.m. accompanying her to the bridegroom's home and participation in the festive meal there. (At the one wedding in Rakawa it was said that 300 men were fed simultaneously.) Then a dance dance which, ending at about 4 p.m. is a sign that the festival is over, whereafter the men go home. In addition to the bride price paid by the bridegroom, his parents must, in the villages, pay for the men used to fetch the bride and for the wedding meal and dance.

The women's part runs parallel to the men's without the two groups having any contact with each other. The women invited to the party assembled in the bridegroom's home some hours before the men's cortège, including the bride's one, could be expected to come into sight on the narrow mountain track leading to the village. At the wedding I witnessed, the women were given the three-walled central room on the first floor that opened out on to the clay roof covering the entrance hall to the house,

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11:Johnson G-3 (no date) 1940 MA11 Kurd MAll
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The Kurd is born into a world of feasting and dancing: to the music of pipe and drum Kurdish women still dance the traditional, at a ceremonious festival, for hours on end

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852 circumcised at about the age of seven.
304 Once more the relatives and friends gather, sweetmeats are produced, and there are two days of preliminary feasting and music to dim the pain of the operation. On the third day, when the operation is performed, the *rukbdist* (national dance) is danced, in which men and women stand arm in arm in a row swaying backwards and forwards while music and singing fill the night with sound.

583 The next great event in the life of the young Kurd is his marriage. When he reaches about eighteen years of age, or earlier among the tribes, he takes a wife. Among the poorer people a girl of one family is exchanged for a girl of another family, and a double marriage takes place; or if one girl is too young, she is set aside as the *dengwaz* or fiancée of the boy until old enough to be married (that is, about 14 years old in the case of women). So for a poor family the only expense incurred is three days of feasting and the

4; Wilson G-2 (no date) 1927 MSS Iraq MSS
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Kurdish music is [illegible]

resembling the chanter of a bagpipe and as often a pleasant lilt. Kurdish dancing, however, is by no measure strenuous as Scottish. Kurds and all other mountain dwellers in Kurdistan dance what is known as the chain-dance, similar to that which is, I believe, commonly seen in the Balkans. The dancers join hans and form a ring. The piper and a drummer with a sort of tenor cum stand in the middle, and the dance consists of fairly intricate footwork while the circle moves slowly round. Often star dancers cho fancy themselves as budding Nijinskys do solo dances inside ie circle. Amongst the Kurds the men and women dance separate, but with the Christian sects the two sexes dance together. This doe not mean, however, that Kurdish women are completely segregated c kept by themselves. As a matter of fact, they possess considerable realom and may be seen gathering firewood, tending animals or engaged in other tasks on the mountainside, often far from their villages.

Up to five years ago the Barzan distric of Kurdistan retained all of its savage and primitive features. Government had not penetrated and Shaikh Ahmed, a religious fanatic, wa dictator. With the help of his brothers and a standing army of several hundred men he completely dominated the impoverished inhabitants, who had the shaikh's bodyguard perpetually billeted on them as who had to provide them with food, clothing and tobacco and anying else they might fancy. Any protests on the part of the villager were discouraged by the strongest methods. Such complete ascendancy did Shaikh Ahmed gain over his savage and illiterate people that they began to look upon him as a god and, though Muslims in name, turned their faces towards him in prayer rather than towards Mecca, ancestrious demands. There was a Mullah in the district called Mullah aj, who represented himself *to be the prophet of this new god.* The Mullah was a very fiery and eloquent speaker and, unfortunately for himself, his fame began to surpass even that of the deity. This could ne of course be tolerated, and one of Shaikh Ahmed's brothers "bumped off" the presumptuous prophet. Up to that time the Koran had been revered, but now the Shaikh issued orders for the destruction of all copies to be found. He also withdrew the ban on the eating of pork, for wild pig were plentiful in Barzan. Armed missionaries were sent out beyond the Barzan bounds, and villages which refused to accept the Shaikh were burned and a number of the male inhabitants put to death. This state of affairs could not be allowed to continue, and the 'Iraq Government was forced to take action in conjunction with the British Royal Air Force.

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